

POINTS REGARDING THE 1992 NCHS SIDS STUDY

- * The lead author of the NCHS study has been quoted as saying, "From this data, we have a fairly strong association but because of limitations of the data, we can't say there is a cause-and-effect relationship here." (Kansas City Star, December 5, page A-9)
- * The methods used to estimate exposure to tobacco smoke in this study are not accurate methods. The mothers filled out a survey of approximately 200 questions, an average of 19 months after the birth for case infants and an average of 17 months after the birth for control infants. The question used to estimate exposure to parental smoking after birth was, "On the average, how many cigarettes do you smoke a day now?" The number of cigarettes a mother smokes as long as 18-19 months after the unexplained death of her infant is not necessarily the same as she smoked while the infant was still living. The authors themselves concede that their data "do not allow the determination" of such factors. The authors also concede that the accuracy of the self-reported data used to estimate exposure "is a concern."
- * Apparently, the only major potential confounding variables controlled for in this study were maternal age, level of maternal education and marital status. There are many more potential confounding variables (such as sleeping position, type of feeding, etc.) which should have been controlled for.
- * According to several research groups, although there are hundreds of published papers on SIDS, its cause or causes remain unknown. Even the authors of the present study concede that, "Although many theories have been proposed to explain the etiology of SIDS, an underlying cause for SIDS has not been identified."
- * Researchers have questioned whether there is actually a condition known as SIDS or whether SIDS is actually a collective diagnosis assigned to many different types of unexplained infant deaths. The authors of the present study concede that, "As with any analysis of SIDS, this study is limited by the inherent difficulties in accurately identifying a death from SIDS."
- * In the NCHS study, different relationships were found for black and white infants between the smoking of other household members and the risk of SIDS. Why should this be the case if there is a true relationship between amount of exposure to ETS and the risk of SIDS?

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The authors of the study write:

To demonstrate a causal relationship between maternal smoking after pregnancy and SIDS death, it is necessary to determine that the mother spent a substantial amount of time with, and smoked cigarettes near, the infant. Unfortunately, the NMIHS lacks the detailed information necessary to make those determinations.

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